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# The **P**ALIMPSEST

MAY 1943

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JOHN ELY BRIGGS

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## THE PURPOSE OF THIS MAGAZINE

THE PALIMPSEST, issued monthly by the State Historical Society of Iowa, is devoted to the dissemination of Iowa History. Supplementing the other publications of this Society, it aims to present the materials of Iowa History in a form that is attractive and a style that is popular in the best sense—to the end that the story of our Commonwealth may be more widely read and cherished.

BENJ. F. SHAMBAUGH

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## THE MEANING OF PALIMPSEST

In early times a palimpsest was a parchment or other material from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete; and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the records of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.

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# THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY JOHN ELY BRIGGS

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## Merle D. Hay

Memories of the night of November 2, 1917, are indelibly engraved upon the minds of a few survivors of Company F, Second Battalion of the Sixteenth United States Infantry. On that night, over twenty-five years ago, the opening chapter was written in the illustrious history of the First Division of American troops in the first World War. It was on the night of November 2nd that Company F took over its first front-line position, received its baptism of enemy fire, bore the brunt of the first German raid against American troops, and lost the first killed, wounded, and captured in actual combat.

Not until November 5th, however, were the details of the engagement reported in Iowa newspapers. Of the three men who had been killed, one was Private Merle D. Hay of Glidden, Iowa. Private Dewey D. Kern of Collins was listed as having been captured, but this report was erroneous. Kern was not lost. There was no mis-



take, however, about the death of Merle Hay. He, with Private Thomas Enright and Corporal James Gresham, had paid the supreme sacrifice in a raid that cost America three killed, seven wounded, and eleven captured.

The son of Mr. and Mrs. Harvey D. Hay, Merle was born on July 20, 1896, on an Iowa farm near Carrollton in Carroll County. The story of his boyhood was similar to that of many another Iowa farm boy who grew up to hear his country's call to battle in April, 1917. Merle was one of eight Glidden youths to enlist in the Regular Army early in May. The town gave them a farewell party in the Methodist Church on May 7th and the next morning the little group left for Des Moines. For Merle it was the first step toward France and immortality. Mrs. Hay had a premonition that she had bade her son good-bye for the last time — that he was destined to be killed.

From Des Moines the Glidden boys, still together, were sent to Fort Logan, Colorado, then to Texas, and thence to the Atlantic seaboard. All but one landed in France on June 26 or 27, 1917, as part of the Sixteenth United States Infantry. After arriving at St. Nazaire, the First Division, consisting of the Sixteenth, Eighteenth, Twenty-sixth, and Twenty-eighth Infantry and a Marine detachment, moved by successive steps



into the Gondrecourt Training Area about July 6th. There they received two months of intensive drill in modern warfare under a picked corps of Alpine Chasseurs, the best trained and most courageous of French soldiers. After the completion of this combat training course the regiment moved to Demange-aux-Eau to be ready for front-line duty. On October 23rd the first battalion relieved a French unit in the quiet Sommer-viller sector north of Toul. After a week in which nothing happened, they were moved out and the second battalion including Company F was ordered up for front-line experience. They moved in trucks to Valhey and then on foot into Bathelemont where, on November 1st, they met the first battalion coming out.

Spending the night at Bathelemont, the replacements, at about five o'clock the next evening, moved into the front lines. The men, loaded down with extra ammunition and equipment, advanced slowly over broken duck boards, across shattered trenches, and through flooded or mud-filled holes. They reached their destination at ten o'clock. Five hours had been required to hike that one long mile. The first platoon with forty-six men, including four automatic riflemen from the fourth platoon, was assigned to the front positions. The occupied area, about one hundred yards in depth,



lay some five hundred yards from the German lines. Both trench systems were on slightly rising ground with a low valley between.

The Americans moved into the position "in good order, without lights, talking or smoking." Privates Hay and Enright were posted as sentries, while Corporal Gresham had charge of the firing squad slightly farther up the trench. Both Gresham and Enright were veterans of several years' service before America had entered the war. All was quiet except for an occasional rat-a-tat-tat from some nervous machine gunner or an occasional Very light from the enemy. Lured by exhaustion and a false sense of safety, most of the company prepared for a few hours' rest.

But that rest was rudely interrupted. At three o'clock in the morning the enemy turned loose what the French observers afterward declared to be "the most intense bombardment they had ever witnessed". Sixteen batteries of ninety-six guns, ranging from one-pounders to six-inch pieces, threw over in forty-five minutes, according to French estimates, several thousand shells. All that saved the battalion from complete annihilation was the depth of the dugouts, the muddy ground, and the absence of loose stones. The concentrated bombardment melted the soggy trenches like butter. "Climbing and stumbling



over the ruins", the commanding lieutenant ordered the men into dugouts. "Only a few remained on outpost duty."

After three-quarters of an hour the bombardment was suddenly shifted into a half-circle barrage in the rear to prevent reinforcement. The raiders blasted gaps in the wire entanglements with long gas pipes filled with explosives, unheard amid the heavier cannonading. In pitch darkness 240 veteran Bavarians penetrated the battered American lines.

The first the Americans knew that the enemy had invaded their position was when machine gun bullets and hand grenades crashed against the dugout entrances. Company F came out fighting in the darkness, unable to tell friend from foe until locked in deadly grapple. "What's up?" shouted one young American. "A shot answered his question. He shot the shooter and next time shot first without questions."

Cut off from reinforcements, their lieutenant partly unconscious from shell shock, knowing only that the enemy was overwhelming them with superior numbers, the little handful of men fought blindly to the last. In the darkness, friend and foe looked alike. It was reported that Corporal Gresham was killed by a man who spoke to him in English. Hay was shot through the head by



one whom he may never have seen. Each died at his post of duty. Enright who was found later on top of the parapet had evidently been surrounded but had put up a terrific fight, as his throat had been cut, his chest ripped open, and his body torn with twelve bayonet wounds.

The German raiders retired after about fifteen minutes, taking their dead and wounded with them and all American equipment they could locate. The American casualties were eleven prisoners, seven wounded, and three dead — twenty-one in all. Thus, nearly half of the platoon was lost in the raid. The Americans were outnumbered more than five to one. No help came until after the merciless artillery fire had ceased. "Though the affair was comparatively trivial in the great war drama, the individual deeds of heroism shine forth with greater intensity."

In the morning the three dead soldiers were carried to the rear where they were buried with simple military rites. With a squad of French infantrymen in their picturesque uniforms of red and horizon blue standing on one side and a detachment of Americans on the other the flag-draped caskets were lowered into the grave as a bugler blew taps and a battery at the front fired minute guns. General Paul Emile Joseph Bordeaux, commanding officer of the French sector,



paid tribute to the first Americans to fall in battle. His words, accompanied by the roar of guns and punctuated by the whistle of shells, touched both the French and Americans.

In the name of the French army and in the name of France, he saluted the valiant men who had sacrificed their lives. "They accepted the hard and strenuous life", he explained, "they crossed the ocean at great peril; they took their places on the front by our side, and they have fallen facing the foe in a hard and desperate hand to hand fight. Their families, friends and fellow citizens will be proud when they learn of their deaths. Honor to them.

"Men," the general continued, "these graves, the first to be dug in our national soil and only a short distance from the enemy, are a mark of the mighty land we and our allies firmly cling to in the common task, confirming the will of the people and the army of the United States to fight with us to a finish, ready to sacrifice as long as is necessary until final victory for the most notable of causes — that of the liberty of nations — the weak as well as the mighty. Thus the deaths of these humble soldiers appear to us with extraordinary grandeur.

"We will, therefore, ask that the mortal remains of these young men be left here, left with us



forever. We inscribe on the tombs, 'Here lie the first soldiers of the republic of the United States to fall on the soil of France for liberty and justice.' The passerby will stop and uncover his head. Travelers and men of heart will go out of their way to come here to pay their respective tributes."

General Pershing, in writing of his experiences in the first World War, remembered that this "joint homage to our dead, there under the fire of the guns, seemed to symbolize the common sacrifices our two peoples were to make in the same great cause. It seemed as though their death had sealed a new pact of understanding and comradeship between the two armies."

At home in Iowa a public memorial service was held in the Presbyterian Church of Glidden on November 12, 1917. With Mayor R. A. Hamilton in charge, resolutions of pride and sorrow were adopted and short talks were made by several local pastors.

The admonition of General Bordeaux, that the graves of the first Americans to fall on the battlefields of Europe should remain in France as a shrine to liberty and justice, was not long observed. In the summer of 1921 the bodies of Enright, Gresham, and Hay were removed from Bathelemont across the Atlantic to their own country. On July 14th Merle Hay came home to Glid-



den. There in the American Legion hall his body lay in state, guarded by men who had been his comrades over there.

Governor Nate E. Kendall had ordered, by official proclamation, that all flags on public buildings be lowered to half-staff on Sunday, July 24, 1921, the day set for the funeral. In a spirit of deep reverence, over ten thousand Iowans went to Glidden for the ceremony. Cars began to arrive early in the morning and transcontinental trains stopped to let off sympathetic passengers. Boy Scouts on duty counted 1835 cars on Main Street and around the schoolhouse square by noon. All traffic on the Lincoln Highway was stopped or detoured. At three o'clock, under the direction of Legion Commander F. W. Franzwa of the Glidden Post, six comrades in olive-drab uniforms and trench hats carried the casket from the Legion hall to a chautauqua platform set up on the schoolhouse lawn, where formal memorial services were held in the presence of Merle's parents, his brother, Basil, his sister, Mrs. H. Cromwell, and thousands of fellow Iowans.

Sheriff W. E. Robb of Polk County and former Chaplain of the 168th Infantry in the Rainbow Division sensed the prevailing attitude when he said, "We will not look upon his grave with sorrow but with the greatest pride." Later he spoke



prophetically: "They fought to relieve militarism as a menace. The fruits of their victory will be only temporary unless we see the vision as they saw it — the flags of the nations grouped together in associations which will prevent the repetition of such a holocaust." Preceded by the uniformed band of Argonne Post of the Des Moines American Legion, the body was slowly borne to the cemetery and with loving hands consigned to its final resting place.

"If it has been necessary that he lay down his life for his country, I'm proud of the boy", commented his father. His mother, overcome with grief and illness, sadly remembered his last letter, mailed somewhere in France on September 28, 1917. "My but I would like to be there and eat some of that stuff you are canning. My but it would taste good. And some of that bread you were baking and some of those sweet rolls that you were writing about. I would surely have some feed. I would eat a dozen of them."

It was of this boy that his lieutenant, Willis E. Comfort, had written soon after that fatal night in November, 1917: "He was a faithful soldier, one we could trust. At all times was his work of high quality but especially at the time of his death did he prove his true worth. He stayed at his post of duty and fought to the last. We are proud of



the true American spirit shown by him and his comrades." Surely it is in the common service of such common people that our nation has become uncommonly great.

But other honors have been paid and will be paid to Merle Hay as long as Iowa stands as a part of a free nation of freedom-loving people. On November 19, 1917, the Des Moines City Council decided to rename the road to Camp Dodge from that city as the Merle Hay Memorial Highway. It seemed appropriate that the road between the capital of the State and the camp where soldiers were being trained should "bear the name of the brave lad who was the first of our soldiers to be killed in action." On May 30, 1921, a huge memorial boulder was dedicated on the highest point on this road, now part of U. S. Highway 64. Major Casper Schenk, the principal speaker on that occasion, reminded the assembled crowd that memories might fade but "here will be a permanent tribute that will stand 1000 years, defying time's erosion, to silently proclaim the name of Iowa's premier hero to the millions that pass along this highway." At Mrs. Hay's request the boulder was unveiled by a private of the Fourteenth Cavalry who was participating in the exercises. Rain interfered with the program somewhat and the crowd had entirely dispersed before



a Curtiss plane piloted by West Close, a former army pilot, circled the spot to drop a wreath of flowers.

On May 27, 1928, a special memorial service in honor of men killed in battle was held at the grave of Merle Hay. Six Legion posts and two companies of the National Guard also participated. Governor John Hammill spoke to three or four thousand people, predicting that this grave would become a shrine for patriotic Iowans.

Two years later Glidden was again the scene of a memorial service. On Sunday, May 25, 1930, before crowds estimated from six to ten thousand people, a monument in honor of Merle D. Hay, for which the State legislature had appropriated five thousand dollars, was unveiled in Westlawn Cemetery. The beautiful memorial of gray Georgia granite bears a reproduction of a cartoon by J. N. (Ding) Darling published on the occasion of the death of Hay.

Featured on the program were the Drum Corps from Legion posts at Gowrie and Coon Rapids, the 185th Field Artillery Band from Boone, and National Guard units from Boone, Jefferson, and Audubon. Members of the memorial commission were introduced by chairman C. C. Helmers of Carroll, while State Legion Commander Glenn C. Haynes, said to have been the officer of longest



front-line experience in the American Expeditionary Force, spoke briefly and eloquently. At the close of his address, the American Legion post at Breda "unveiled the monument, which was then decorated by the ladies and the firing squad fired the customary salute, followed by taps and echo taps."

On May 26, 1940, hundreds again gathered in spite of threatened rain to dedicate a stone fence 750 feet long across the front of the cemetery and forming an alcove setting for the Hay monument. Nearly five thousand cubic feet of local stone had been donated for the fence by farmers in Carroll, Sac, and Greene counties. The beautiful and unique wall of rugged materials was designed by landscape engineers of Iowa State College and built as a WPA project. The iron work and gates were fashioned by the National Youth Administration shop in Des Moines.

The State Highway Commission erected "Historic Memorial Ahead" signs at appropriate distances along U. S. Highway 30. As a result, thousands of tourists have, since 1940, stopped to pay their tribute to Merle D. Hay who "left a happy and prosperous country" to fight to the finish for his ideals.

RAY MURRAY



## Ole Bull and the Fire

In February, 1872, the *Press* was vigorously advocating the establishment of a Holly Water Works in Iowa City. The cost, according to the newspaper, would be \$75,000, but the danger from fire was so acute that the expenditure would be justified. In time the savings from diminished fire losses would more than pay for the plant, argued Editor John P. Irish. Like the warnings of Cassandra, however, the dire predictions of the newspaper went unheeded.

At the same time, the *Press* was advertising the concert to be given on March 18th by the world-famous violinist, Ole Bull. His troupe also included Miss Gertrude Orme, soprano; Mr. J. H. Chatterson, tenor; and Mr. Alfred Richter, pianist.

On the surface, there seemed to be no connection between Ole Bull's concert, fire protection, and a waterworks plant.

The concert was a success. Metropolitan Hall was crowded with an enthusiastic audience which, after numerous encores, went home extolling the performances of the great virtuoso and his company. The artists, after a late supper, retired to



their beds in the Clinton House, a hostelry noted throughout the region for the hospitality maintained by its genial proprietor, Colonel M. D. Wood. The hotel stood on the southeast corner of Clinton and College streets.

It was the quietest time of the night — too late for the "night owls" still to be about, and too early for the earliest risers to be astir — when the peaceful slumber of the guests in the hotel was suddenly disturbed by the vicious crackle of flames and the pungent smell of smoke. The alarm was sounded and the terrified sleepers hastily grabbed whatever objects first came to hand and rushed out of the burning building into the cold winter night.

The most precious possession of Ole Bull was, of course, his violin. The artist, forgetting everything else, tucked the instrument under his arm and dashed out of the flaming building with the tails of his nightshirt (in this pre-pajama era) flapping behind him. Having gained the security of the street, he remembered his watch which he had left in the room. It had a sentimental as well as a monetary value, and Ole Bull offered fifty dollars to George Herron, the negro porter, if he would go back into the hotel and retrieve it. Since he was perfectly familiar with the plan of the building, Herron accomplished his daring mission and won the fifty dollars. The night watchman,



George Andrews, was not so fortunate. He climbed a ladder into Ole Bull's room and saved the trunk, but he received no reward for this brave deed. Mr. Bull was grateful, but he had not requested this service and felt no obligation to Andrews.

The fire cost other persons dearly. Mr. and Mrs. C. W. Burlingame, who had lived on the third floor, lost a piano worth a thousand dollars. A Mr. Magee saw his belongings consumed, to the value of fifteen hundred dollars, and Henry Morrow lost goods worth five hundred. The building itself, almost a total ruin, constituted a loss of about \$35,000.

The citizens were helpless to extinguish the blaze. There was a strong northwest wind, and for a time much of the city was in danger of being swept by the conflagration. Embers were blown two blocks away, and several houses caught fire but these flames were soon put out. The next day the *Press* summarized the situation in a manner that left no doubt as to why the Clinton House burned down. "No fire apparatus, no water, no nothing, and the people could only fold their arms and watch the devouring element."

The *Press* had a right to say, "We told you so", for its prophecies about disasters from fire had come true. On March 20th, the paper hoped



that the city had learned its lesson. The magistrates had ignored the "public clamor" for adequate fire protection. Two things were needed — a well-equipped fire company, and an adequate supply of water. The Clinton House could have been saved if these necessities had been available.

There was no active fire company in Iowa City in 1872, and the only available water supply, besides wells, were the cisterns which had been constructed at intervals throughout the city. The cisterns were almost useless. The *Press* reported on March 25th that three fires had occurred within "spitting distance" of the reservoir at College and Clinton streets, "and yet we think never a pint of water has been taken therefrom for use". Every year the cisterns were filled, and then they were promptly forgotten until the next year when it was time to refill them.

A fire company had been organized in 1855 — the Iowa City Fire Company No. 1 — which was known as the German company, for its membership was recruited mainly from the German element in Iowa City and commands were given in the German tongue. Like most volunteer companies of the day, it was a private venture undertaken by public-spirited citizens who shouldered the burden of fire protection that the city was then unwilling to assume. There were other incentives



for joining besides the impulse of civic pride. To belong to a fire company in those days was to be recognized among the socially elite of a community. The volunteer fire company was as much a private club as it was an enterprise dedicated to public service. Besides enjoying the advantages of club privileges, adventurous fellows who loved dashing to fires could have a legitimate and official purpose if they belonged to an organized department. Perhaps it was more than an incidental attraction to be able to wear the brilliant uniforms that firemen so proudly displayed when on parade. Certainly the fact that the meeting place of Company No. 1 was the Iowa City Brewery could have had nothing to do with engendering the enthusiasm shown by men who desired membership in the company!

They purchased their own fire hose and pumping engine. This machine was later sold to the Amana colonies. During the Civil War the company dwindled, and by 1872 the Iowa City fire department existed only as a memory. Then the Clinton House fire, the expostulations of the *Press*, and the awakening of a few leading citizens, all combined in the spring of 1872 to provide an effective solution to the need for fire protection.

Fred Theobald, Henry Morrow, Henry Murray, A. G. Tucker, and George M. Kenyon met



the day after the Clinton House fire and began to lay their plans. Not until May 21st were the final steps taken. On the evening of that day the "Rescue Hook and Ladder Company" met in the council chamber of the city hall and formed a permanent organization. They drew up a constitution and elected the following officers: Henry Morrow, foreman; Dr. Henry Murray, first assistant foreman; Major Henry Gearkee, second assistant foreman; A. J. Rider, treasurer; and A. G. Tucker, secretary. Three days later the city council voted five hundred dollars for hooks, ladders, and buckets, and, when purchased, this apparatus was to be consigned to the care of the Rescues. All of these actions were taken under the provisions of a city ordinance passed in 1861 to provide for the organization of fire companies in Iowa City.

A few months later the Protection Hose Company came into being, and from that time forward Iowa City possessed a volunteer fire department ranking with the best in the State. The Sawyers, formed in 1883 and named after Fred Sawyer who purchased their uniforms, were for several years among the fastest teams in the annual firemen's tournaments.

A good fire department, even with the best of apparatus, can not work efficiently unless there is



a convenient and adequate supply of water. The events of 1872 revealed how deficient Iowa City was in this respect. But it required another decade of agitation before the city fathers and the citizens could be convinced of the need for a public waterworks system with pumps, mains, and hydrants. The initial cost was large only if fire losses, the added feeling of security, and the convenience of a water system were not considered. These advantages would more than offset the expense imposed upon citizens for use of the water and upon the city for hydrant rental. Not until 1882 did people finally realize this fact. In that year, an ordinance was passed providing for a waterworks system to be ready by 1883.

Thus, more than ten years after Ole Bull had run out into the street from the flaming Clinton House, clutching his violin and shivering in his nightshirt, Iowa City completed the steps necessary to provide for the protection of lives and property from the peril of fire. Perhaps the losses sustained by Mr. Morrow and Mr. Burlingame prompted them to support the movement for a fire company, but the fame of the great violinist, Ole Bull, helped dramatize the Clinton House fire, and concentrated greater attention on the lack of fire protection in Iowa City.

CARL B. CONE



## The Second Fort Des Moines

May, 1943, marks the centennial anniversary of the establishment of Fort Des Moines at the junction of the Des Moines River and the Racoon Fork. Although all visible evidences of this old fort have been removed, it is fitting that the circumstances of the establishment of that early military post should be recalled at this time.

The Des Moines Valley a hundred years ago was occupied by the Sauk and Fox Indians. For several years the pressure of white settlers on the eastern border of the Indian lands had been increasing. Governor Chambers tried to buy a large area in 1841 and remove the Indians from central Iowa to a reservation at the source of the Des Moines River but the Sauks and Foxes refused to sell. In October of the following year, however, a treaty was negotiated whereby the confederated tribes agreed to surrender their land and move to Kansas.

Meanwhile, a company of United States Dragoons, with Captain James Allen in command, had been stationed at Fort Sanford on the left side of the Des Moines River about twenty miles west of Fairfield near the Sauk and Fox agency.



The soldiers were needed not to protect the settlers from savage depredations but primarily to prevent the encroachment of white men on the Indian hunting grounds. Indeed, the traders and land seekers on the frontier were guilty of all sorts of offenses against the Indians. Not only were they anxious to stake out claims in the Indian country but they cheated the red men and debauched them with whisky. The dragoons at Fort Sanford prevented open hostilities but they were unable to stem the tide of settlement or to stop petty crime. Removal of the Indians seemed to be the only feasible plan, but the native red men were reluctant to leave "the lands that were attached to them by the traditions of centuries".

According to the treaty of 1842 the Sauks and Foxes ceded to the United States all their land in central Iowa and agreed to move west of a meridian running through the Red Rocks on the Des Moines River by the following May and to leave the State in three years. In the meantime no settlements were to be permitted within the western part of the reservation.

To protect the Indians in this stipulation and to enable the government to fulfill its obligations under the treaty, the establishment of a military post west of the Red Rocks line seemed desirable. For the purpose of selecting a site for the new



fort, Captain James Allen conducted a short exploratory expedition up the Des Moines River soon after the treaty was signed. It was only a two or three days' ride up the valley from Fort Sanford to the mouth of the Raccoon River. Probably Captain Allen was already familiar with that locality. At all events he looked no farther. There, he decided, the new post should be established.

This location on the principal river in Iowa near the center of the Sauk and Fox territory had often been mentioned as a good site for a fort. A man who knew the country well proposed in 1834 that a company of dragoons should be stationed at the mouth of the Raccoon River and kept "constantly on the trot" to see that Indians and settlers did not quarrel. Colonel Stephen W. Kearny, who was there in 1835, thought that the point of land between the Raccoon and Des Moines rivers was the best place for a fort in that part of the country. In a letter to the War Department, dated December 30, 1842, Captain Allen explained the reasons for his selection of that site for the fort. "I went up, as you know, last month as high as the mouth of the Raccoon River, and had in view at the time to look out a suitable point for the stationing of troops for the time required. And I did select, with a view to



recommend it, the point made by the junction of the Raccoon with the Des Moines. . . .

"My reasons for selecting that point are these: The soil is rich; and wood, stone, water and grass are all at hand. It will be high enough up the river to protect these Indians against the Sioux, and is in the heart of the best part of their new country, where the greatest effort will be made by the squatters to get in. It is about equidistant from the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers, and offers a good route to both, the direct route to the Missouri passing around the heads of many ugly branches of Grand River. It will be 25 miles within the new line, about the right distance from the settlements, and above all of the Indian villages and trading houses (all of the Sacs have determined to make their villages on a larger prairie bottom that commences about two miles below, and the traders have selected their sites there also). It will also be about the head of keel-boat navigation on the Des Moines. I think it better than any point farther up, because it will be harder to get supplies higher up, and no point or post that may be established on this river need be kept up more than three years, or until these Indians shall leave. A post for the northern boundary of future Ioway will go far above the sources of the Des Moines."



Good soldier and officer that he was, Captain Allen offered appropriate suggestions relative to the task at hand, and tendered his services in directing the work, if such an arrangement seemed to be desirable. "Now, as to the process of establishing this post", he wrote, "I do not seek the job; but I am willing to undertake it, if my suggestions for that purpose shall be approved. I would build but common log cabins, or huts, for both men and officers, giving them good floors, windows and doors, stables, very common, but close and roomy. Pickets, Block-houses and such like, not at all. The buildings to be placed in relations of comfort, convenience and good taste, and of defense, so far as the same may comply with the first rule.

"Ten mechanics, and five laborers, and four yoke of oxen, and tools and implements, and the small material, ought to be furnished by the Qr. Master's Dept. All to be ready to go up and begin early in the spring. Pine lumber for the most necessary parts of the buildings ought to be sent up in keel-boats, in the spring rise of the river. Provisions, and corn, &c., may be sent up at the same time.

"With such means and the force of my company, I could make a good and comfortable establishment at the mouth of the Raccoon during the



next summer, and, in the meantime, give to the Indians all necessary protection. One of their agents has told me that the Am. Fur Company would probably send up a steamboat to the Racoon on the spring rise. If they do, it will be a good time to send up army supplies.

"I could easily have corn raised for me in that country if I could now contract for it, and permit a person to open a farm there. Such is the desire of people to get a footing in the country that I believe that now I could hire corn to be raised there, next summer, for 25 cts. per hushel. I could get lumber on as good terms, by allowing some one to build a mill. In short, there will be no difficulty in establishing and maintaining a post there if notice of such a design shall be given in time. But I hope that it will not be required of my company that they shall build this new post without the assistance of the hired labor that I have suggested. I have not the necessary mechanics for the purpose; and if I had, it would be requiring too much of them. It is not competent for dragoons to build their quarters and stables, and get their wood and do their duty as soldiers.

"I have but little to add to what is contained in the foregoing extract of my letter to the colonel. The new post will be so purely temporary that this character of it ought to be kept in view in its



construction. According to the plan and method that I have recommended, this post may be built and established, for one company of dragoons, for about twenty-five hundred dollars.

"If a company of infantry could also be sent to this new post, it would be well, although it would increase somewhat the expense of its establishment. Of the propriety of such an arrangement, the Department will best judge.

"But I will respectfully urge upon the Department the necessity for a speedy decision on the subject of this new post, that if it is to be established early measures may be taken to secure the timely transportation of the necessary materials and supplies. The rise of the Des Moines will occur in March.

"In regard to the point recommended for the new post, I may remark, that I have seen much of the territory of Ioway, and particularly of the valley of the Des Moines, having, in addition to my observations from there to the mouth of the Raccoon, crossed the territory with my company last Summer, on a direct route from Ft. Leavenworth to Ft. Atkinson, crossing the Des Moines above Raccoon, and from all that I have seen and learned I would recommend the point that I have designated as the most suitable for the post in question.



"All of this is predicated on the supposition that the late treaty with the Sac and Fox Indians will be approved and ratified; but this treaty is so very favorable and advantageous to the United States that I feel no apprehension for its fate."

Captain Allen's recommendations relative to the site were approved and Colonel Stephen W. Kearny, then commanding the third district at St. Louis, was directed to cause the post to be established. The Senate, however, delayed ratification of the treaty so that the decision to move the troops from Fort Sanford to the Racoon Fork was not finally determined until the spring of 1843.

By Order No. 6, from the headquarters of the Third Military Department, Jefferson Barracks, on February 20, 1843, it was announced that a "temporary post will be established at as early a period as the weather will permit, on the River Des Moines, at or near the junction of the Racoon, for the protection of the Sac and Fox Indians, and the interests of the Government on that frontier.

"The troops designated for the garrison of the new post are Captain Allen's company of the 1st Dragoons, at present stationed near the Sac and Fox Agency, and a company of the 1st Infantry now stationed at Fort Crawford, to be selected by



the Lieutenant-Colonel commanding the regiment.

"The site of the post will be determined upon by Captain Allen; and he will also have charge of the erection of the requisite buildings for the accommodation of the command; which will be constructed with as strict a regard to economy as may be consistent with the health of the troops, and conformably to the instructions forwarded from this office, or such order as he may hereafter receive from proper authority."

Late in April, 1843, a steamboat came puffing up the Des Moines River and took a load of supplies to the new post. Captain Allen left Fort Sanford with a small detachment of dragoons on April 29th and was at the Raccoon Fork in time to unload the cargo from the boat. Leaving his men to guard the stores, he returned to the old agency for the purpose of completing the transfer of his company and provisions. On May 10th he dispatched a report of his movements to the War Department.

"I have located the post on the point I selected for it last fall, the point made by the junction of the Raccoon with the Des Moines", he wrote. "I have delayed taking up my horses or removing my whole company because of the lateness of the Spring and the consequent scarcity of grass. It is too expensive now to take up full rations of corn,



and, the Des Moines river being low, I could not induce the steamboat that took up the corn and quartermaster's stores to make another trip at reasonable rates. I am using a small keel-boat and wagons, all public, for transportation of corn and some other stores, and will move with my company on the 18th instant. Fairfield, Ioway Territory, will be my first convenient postoffice, until another shall be established in the new territory just vacated by the Indians."

At first the new post was called Fort Raccoon. "I have recommended this name", wrote Captain Allen, "because the place has already a great notoriety under such designation for a great distance around it". But this name did not appeal to the authorities in Washington. "Fort Iowa would be a very good name", in the opinion of Adjutant General R. Jones, "but Raccoon would be shocking; at least in very bad taste." Apparently General Winfield Scott agreed, for a few days later he informed Captain Allen that Raccoon was not considered a proper designation for a military post and that, until otherwise directed, he should call the place Fort Des Moines. To this name Captain Allen objected. "I am afraid", he wrote, "that the latter designation for the post will divert much of our mails and supplies to the late post of this name on the Mississippi, the recollection of which is



still in the minds of many of the postmasters and public carriers." He therefore respectfully suggested "that some name be given to this post to which this inconvenience may not attach." But his letter got lost in the pigeonholes of Washington, and so the name Des Moines became permanently attached to the fort and to the town which, only twelve years later, was designated by law as the capital of the State.

The second Fort Des Moines was a busy place in the summer of 1843. Four officers and forty-eight dragoons arrived from Fort Sanford on the afternoon of May 20th, and they were joined the next day by Company F of the First Infantry under Captain J. R. B. Gardenier. On November 30, 1843, General Scott reported ninety-nine soldiers at the fort, of whom two were captains, three subalterns, one assistant surgeon, and ninety-three non-commissioned officers, musicians, artificers, and privates.

First a wharf was built to facilitate the landing of supplies brought up the river by boat. Next, the men broke sod for gardens. The first building was a storehouse and the second was the hospital at the north end of the parade grounds about three hundred yards west of the Des Moines River. Along a street running west from the wharf were several small log cabins for the sol-



diers. Beyond these barracks were the stables and corrals. Houses for the officers faced another street parallel to the Des Moines River. The buildings were thus arranged in the shape of an L. The flagstaff and well were just inside the angle.

For nearly three years the post at the Raccoon Fork was occupied. In the summer the soldiers worked in the gardens and rode over the prairie on military expeditions. Indians from their villages about two miles down the river often visited the fort, but the whisky-selling traders still preyed upon them. Finally, in March, 1846, the last remnant of the tribesmen who had not already gone to Kansas, in company with the soldiers, set out for the land beyond the Missouri and the site of Fort Des Moines was left for city builders.

JOHN ELY BRIGGS



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